



G W F Hegel, 1770-1831

What Hegel is Not

Jon Stewart's 1996 [Introduction to "The Hegel Myths and Legends"](#) (attached; download linked below) does not give a complete description of the deceptions that surround the work of Hegel – and it launches a few myths of its own.

But what this text can do is to give us some idea of how exceptionally plagued is the work of Hegel with misrepresentation, in a field, philosophy, where misrepresentation and vulgarisation is already common. Jon Stewart writes categorically: *"...the reputation of no other major philosopher has suffered such universal opprobrium on such a broad spectrum of issues as Hegel's has."*

In this piece Stewart gives no indication that he is other than a bourgeois academic. For example, Stewart is happy to relieve Hegel of the "wooden triad", but then to hang the same

“wooden triad” around Karl Marx’s neck. So, we are not reading Stewart for Marxism.

The “wooden triad” is the series, simple to the point of triteness, of “thesis, antithesis and synthesis” that is wrongly attributed to Hegel, according to Stewart. So why pass it on to Marx?

Karl Marx was a brilliant student of philosophy in Berlin, beginning his course at the height of Hegel-mania just five years after the death of Hegel. We will not presume that Marx’s understanding of Hegel was any less than Stewart’s. We will rather take Marx as one of the all-time experts on Hegel, if not the greatest of all.

But Stewart is correct to point out *“the extremely difficult nature of Hegel’s own texts.”*

Stewart continues: *“His complex philosophical system, couched in a stilted, abstract, and idiosyncratic language, has certainly been one of the major causes for the disparity of opinion. Where some see profundity and originality in the obscurity, others see simply gibberish and nonsense. The result of Hegel’s opaque writing style and neologistic vocabulary is that his works remain largely inaccessible to the nonspecialist.”*

A “neologism” is a newly-invented word. An example of such from South Africa in our time would be “tenderpreneur”. Hegel invented words, and also gave his own peculiar meaning to existing words.

Stewart's round-up of information gives a good indication of the place of Hegel within bourgeois philosophy up to today. Hegel's work was a catalyst, not just for the eruption of Marxism, but also of many strains of bourgeois philosophy.

Stewart writes that Hegel's philosophy [which] *"marks the crossroads in the modern intellectual tradition, has given birth to virtually all of the major schools of contemporary thought: phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, critical theory, structuralism, pragmatism, hermeneutics, and so on."*

Between these different strands there has been antagonism from time to time. One of the consequences has been the use of Hegel as a kind of whipping-boy. Stewart gives examples of this.

A consequence of the calumnies that people have laid on Hegel in this way is that people come out of nowhere to attack Hegel, even today, because they are carrying grudges.

We will hold fast in this course to the Marxist understanding of Hegel, not only because we are Marxists, but also because Marxism will give us a steady vantage point and measuring-stick with which to size up Hegel. The warring factions of bourgeois philosophy will not provide such a steady standpoint or scale.

In the next item, we will examine the misleading legacy of Kojève, Edward Said, and the case of "The Other", and then we will take a first look at Hegel's version of dialectics.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Hegel Myths and Legends, Introduction, 1996, Stewart.](#)
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